

Council bars power to burn PCBs

Rejects Com/Electric bid for special conduit

By William Corey
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NEW BEDFORD - Expressing its steadfast resistance to the incineration of PCB-laden sludge in the city's polluted harbor, the City Council Thursday night took further steps to derail federal plans to burn them.

In a united voice, the council denied a request by Commonwealth Electric Co. to install two conduits — underground tubes containing power wires — in Sawyer Street that would have provided electrical power to a toxic waste incinerator.

The board also approved, by a 9-0 vote, a petition to place the following question on the Nov. 2 ballot:

"Two years ago, the people of New Bedford voted by a better than 2-1 margin against the incineration of PCBs and heavy metals from the New Bedford Harbor. Are you in favor of having the federal government use other and safer methods for the removal of PCBs and heavy metals from the Acushnet River?"

The action drew applause from the more than 50 representatives of Hands Across the River and Concerned Parents of Fairhaven — two groups working to stop the Environmental Protection Agency's plan to burn the PCBs.

The group members filled the council chambers, carrying signs that read: "No Electric, EPA Go Away," "No Way, EPA," and "Incineration — A Sewer in the Sky."

"This is one more thing the EPA has to hurdle," said Jim Simmons of Hands Across the River.

He added that he has requested a short meeting with President Bill Clinton while he and his family are vacationing on Martha's Vineyard.

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"The people of this city do not want an incinerator," said Councilor George Rogers, who sponsored the petition to ask the ballot question.

A Commonwealth Electric representative said his company is required under state law to provide electricity to an applicant for service.

Council President Frederick M. Kalisz Jr. said that while that may be the case, the council does not have to grant that permission.

Several residents of the city and neighboring towns also went on record as being opposed to the conduit installation.

A rally against the EPA's planned incineration is slated for 2 p.m. Aug. 29 at the foot of Sawyer Street.

The EPA plan calls for installing a portable incinerator at the foot of Sawyer Street.

Burning is scheduled for later this year or early 1994 and would last four months.

Local residents and elected officials are concerned about possible health dangers caused by the incinerator's emissions.

"This is like an obstacle course now," said Councilor Rogers, noting that city ordinances have been passed to prohibit almost anything to do with PCB incineration.

"There's just no way now. The EPA can't walk all over us," he said.

In other council business, a proposal to create a New Bedford-Fairhaven Veterans Service District was sent to the Committee on Elderly Affairs, Health, Housing and Veterans.

Fairhaven selectmen Chairman Ruth Galary asked for the council's support to let the six or so Fairhaven veterans seeking service get that help in New Bedford.

The move would save Fairhaven the expense of hiring a veterans agent.

The town has agreed to give New Bedford \$15,000 to cover the additional costs.

Mrs. Galary said she needed council approval before Sept. 1, when funds for her town's veterans agent will run out.

Opposition to the plan was led by Councilor David Alves, who said he did not want to set a precedent by approving a regional center before spelling out guidelines on how it would accommodate out-of-town veterans and what fees should be charged.

A compromise was reached to send it to committee and call a special meeting by Sept. 1.